
Title: Battle for the Bridge

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A dark shape moved in the shadows. The pale moonlight reflected, for a fraction of second, on the metal of the axe. A log fell, smothered by the forest's soil. The shape moved further away, heavily.

Not far away, they were preparing. Only the repeating song of the nightly insects could be heard, apart of the breath of horses and calm footsteps. By the old wooden bridge, one of the necromancers was meditating, his face hidden under the shade of his black wizard's hat. He looked gloomily at the thick water below him.

The river itself looked anguished, disturbed by the presence of the sinister troop. If the flow had not naturally pushed forward, it would have flown back immediately. The silence was oppressing.

A warrior approached and nodded at the sorcerer. A short glance showed him undistinct forms over the bridge, motionless under the slight nightly breeze. They would not pass. He had commanded himself to trap the bridge, one was never too cautious. A crow moaned somewhere on a tree. He didn't pay attention.

Everything was ready. He
nodded back, and the
armoured warrior armed
her heavy crossbow with
a fierce shine in her
eyes.

At the other side of the
bridge, the soldiers waited
for the baroness to
command the assault. She
had told them to be very
careful, for she expected,
once again, to be tricked
by the dark cultists. A
captain drove his horse
to the little hill where
the baroness and her
archmages awaited.

'The men are impatient,
milady. I fear i will not
be able to retain them
for long', he whispered.

An arrogant knight
frowned and pulled out
his precious sword.
'We are numerous.
There's nothing to fear,
my liege. Are we going to
stop and wait for hours
before every clearing just
because of your paranoia
'?

The baroness slapped him
in the face with
indignation.
'Do not tell me what to
do, Varlan !'

She met the disapproving
stare of all the men
around her, and sighed.
Something wasn't right.
She knew they were
somewhere, hiding and
waiting. But it was
already the third time
tonight, and nothing had
happened. It seemed only
her could feel the
presence of the
necromancers, and she
cursed her generals for

their blindness.
Embarrassed, she nodded
at them, and raised her
sword to give the assault
signal. They rushed at the
bridge.

Suddenly, glows of fire
burnt the air. Screams
spouted out as walls of
fire envelopped the first
horsemen over the bridge,
and their horrible moans
of pain mixed with the
furious breath of the
deadly flames. The army
stepped back immediately,
leaving its most impatient
knights burning to ashes
in general indifference.

They were all staring at
the huge firewalls, faces
painted with horror and
amazement. The captain
ran at the baroness.
'They have blocked the
bridge ! it is all blocked
with rocks and it
exploded ! We...' He
sobbed, terrorized.

Baron Ragnar frowned. He
could see forward his
most brave soldiers trying
to force the passage on
the bridge. The horses
were mad with terror,
and their riders
sometimes fell in the
fire. Others were trying
to move the rocks enough
to clear a way through.
He saw one of them
being literally transpierced
by a crossbow bolt
before exploding in front
of his team. The entrails
spouted out everywhere
and a sinister smell of
burnt meat flew around.
Several soldiers turned
away to not see. Ragnar
looked up and
strengthened his grasp on
his spellbook with anger.
Another yell from the
bridge attracted his

attention. Out of the howling black smoke, a confused group of men were carrying a corpse. He rushed at them with a bad feeling.

One of the archmages was already started to utter magic words of healing. Worried faces looked at the laying body of the baroness. Her leg was badly damaged, and blood poured from her chest where a violent impact of energy had melted her chainmail. She was already unconscious. It was more than enough. Ragnar yllled at his personal guard to follow him. Out of the infernal place, where blazing fire and magic spells were tearing as one the remains of the Barony's expedition, the squad of knights galloped away.

Lord Smogg Azalin was grinning with satisfaction. He moved his hands over his head and another lightning strucked the other side of the river, with a cracking sound almost hidden by the screams everywhere. The plan had worked beyond his expectations : once again, the Barony was humiliated and held away. At his side, the cohorts of the Cult blasted arrows and bolts towards the melee, while his sorcerers yelled incantations and bashed the air with glowing palms of death.

Suddenly, the bushes on his right opened and a small group of horsemen rushed in with war cries.

Their faces looked
desperate and the blaze
of the burning bridge
reflected on their silver
plate-mails.

The Cult leader instantly
protected himself with a
magic reactive armour,
then stepped back, as the
closest warriors of the
Cult ran and surrounded
him to protect their
master. Two of the
attackers fell within a
few seconds, until their
leader commanded to run
to the forest and
prepare to assault again.

Already, some
necromancers had
abandoned the bridge and
came spitting a rain of
fireballs at the running
knights. They stopped
when they disappeared in
the depths of the woods.
Lord Smogg quickly
evaluated the situation.

In spite of the position
they held, the Cult was
now caught between two
fires. He spoke a few
words to the nearest
magus with his low voice,
and one by one the
cultists retreated, taking
advantage of the
confusion.

He didn't want to lose
his warriors for nothing.
The Barony's troops had
treacherously attacked by
the rear, and they were
too numerous for the
necromancers to handle
two fronts at once.
Sooner or later, the
infect swarm would
manage to cross the
bridge.

A necromancer opened a
moongate and they
vanished one by one into
the portal. Behind them,
the enemy was still

fighting, this time alone.
One of the sorcerers had
an evil laughter, which
echoed alone in the
distorted space as the
moongate disappeared.

Little by little the
firewalls extincted and
the wind blew the smoke
away. Only desolation was
still holding the other
side. The Barony's
sergeant commanded to
his few remaining men to
pause. Was it a new
trick ? His beating heart
didn't know what to do.
He sighed with relief
when he noticed baron
Ragnar standing beyond
the river, with his
guards. He wanted to
shout victory, but his
throat could only
croak half a prayer.
The land was theirs. They
had defeated the dark
armies... at least that's
what he thought. What
he wanted to think. He
sat on a rock and stayed
silent. There was almost
nothing left of his
squadron. He could only
see smoking corpses and
agonizing friends.